

Christianity and Society

- Drive-In Churches

PETER VIERECK

- "Christian Action" in Perspective

ROBERT T. HANDY

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- Editorials
- Book Reviews
- News of Christian Action

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY

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Table of Contents

	PAGE
Editorials	3
Drive-In Churches: The So-Called Return to Values	8
by Peter Viereck	
"Christian Action" in Perspective	10
by Robert T. Handy	
Book Reviews	15
News of Christian Action	22
Notice to Subscribers	23

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CHRISTIANITY and SOCIETY

EDITORIALS

FAREWELL . . .

This issue of *Christianity and Society* will be the last, and we must manage to say a fitting farewell: The journal has survived two decades of tumultuous history and had succeeded in starting the twenty-first year when the organization sponsoring it thought it wise to discontinue its more formal activities. If we spend some time in a backward glance before saying farewell, we may well devote some of the retrospect to the organizational history for which this journal was the voice.

Our journal began as the voice of the Fellowship of Socialist Christians. It was significant of the changing emphasis in social Christianity in this nation in the past twenty years that the fellowship changed its name, after the first decade, to Frontier Fellowship. The first issues of the journal reveal that, from its very inception, the fellowship challenged orthodox Marxism. That is why it called itself a fellowship of "socialist Christians" rather than "Christian socialists." Nevertheless, the socialist presuppositions of the fellowship were clear in the early days, which were the days of the beginning of the Roosevelt revolution. The fellowship partly challenged and partly shared the dogmas of socialism and the presuppositions of the "social gospel" tradition in modern Christianity. The worst that can be said about the fellowship, including its editorial voice, *Christianity and Society*, and the man who wrote most of the editorials (including this one) was that the fellowship was born in the thirties, and that the journal began publication almost synchronously with the New Deal, and that we all judged the beginning of this very significant pragmatic social revolution (which changed the whole face of America and its conscience) from the standpoint of an abstract idealism which we professed to abhor.

Only the tragedies and catastrophes of

two decades of tumultuous domestic and international history could cure Christian idealists of exhibiting a tendency toward abstractness in practice which they vigorously rejected in principle. They did not foresee that the New Deal in America and similar developments in Europe would move toward the mixed economy and welfare state which have now made the old argument about capitalism and the nationalization of the means of production otiose. Those socialist parties of Europe which are genuinely creative as the instruments of justice have long since abandoned socialist dogmas in favor of pragmatic democratic politics. It is safe to predict that the effort of Aneurin Bevan to re-establish the socialist dogmas in the British Labor party has no chance of success.

Meanwhile, we ought always to have realized that even a very mild socialism would be irrelevant to the American political scene. The fluid class structure of the American society failed to provide the class resentments which furnish the socialist cause with its primary motive power. The first issue of our journal, originally called *Radical Religion*, contained a plea for the formation of an American labor party. The then young author is now an official of a labor union. Neither he nor we anticipated the tremendous expansion of the labor movement with the organization of the semi-skilled workers by the new CIO, which has now merged with the old AF of L, forming a powerful united body of fifteen million organized workers. The movement is now so big that one may understand the apprehensions of even some staunch friends of labor about its effect upon our life, though one does not share the prejudiced fears of the NAM.

Social Christianity developed theologically in the sense that it gradually jettisoned some of the liberalistic and moralistic illusions of the old "social gospel" and the

dogmatic illusions of the socialist movement. But this theological development was aided and abetted by our whole Western history, in which the democratic give and take and the lessons of the Second World War gradually distilled a pragmatic approach to the problems of social justice, an approach which prevented the incipient civil war between the rival dogmatic creeds of both right and left from becoming overt and catastrophic. Our development in America was synchronous with the ecumenical development in Protestant social and political ethics and was probably influenced by these ecumenical trends.

Whatever may be true about these common developments in both theology and social policy in America and Europe, they prompted the founding, on a nation-wide scale, of the organization called Christian Action. The name was unfortunate, because the organization was born at the precise moment when it became a general conviction that there could not be an unambiguous Christian witness on one side or the other in the realm of politics. But the mistaken name was not responsible for the immediate success and the final failure of Christian Action to establish itself as a nation-wide organization of socially conscious Christians. Part of the failure must be ascribed to the growing activity of the various denominations in the field of social action, a growth which left little room for an inter-denominational group. Thus Christian Action was, in part, a victim of tendencies which it itself helped to set in motion. It is safe to predict that, whatever the future of this organization, American Protestantism will never again sink into the irrelevant, individualistic quietism from which the "social gospel" rescued it or into the unrealistic type of social concern which the old "social gospel" frequently expressed.

In a word of farewell one is tempted to become personal and express gratitude to the many sensitive spirits with whom this organization, through two decades of history, brought one in contact. They belonged to the "remnant," to the true leaven of the church. But these personal words must be

spoken personally, and we must content ourselves with official retrospects, regrets, and hopes. One hope is that the activities of a very small group may have left some slight deposit of grace in the common life of the church and the nation, so that these, as well as other human activities, may not be revealed in the end to be no more than "sound and fury, signifying nothing."

R. N.

Is This the Collapse of a Tyranny?

The news about Russia and the Russian empire and its possible disintegration continues to multiply. There has been a riot in Poland and in that part of it which was newly settled after the Germans were driven out. There seems to be a difference of policy between the anti-Stalinist Communist premier and the pro-Stalinist party secretary. Unrest is spreading. Tito has had his triumphal tour of Russia and seems to have been given some kind of secondary authority to marshal the "uncommitted" world, and possibly the satellite nations, into the camp of "socialism". Is he to be the front man for the Communist tyranny?

The outline of a party struggle in the Kremlin itself is partly apparent. Khrushchev, Bulganin, and Zhukov are evidently in the anti-Stalinist camp, while Malenkov, Molotov, and possibly Kaganovich seem more loyal to the old order. The issue is probably on the degree of speed regarded as safe in the demythologizing process. Togliatti, the Italian Communist leader, the French Communists, and even the lowly American Communist Party dare to criticize the present leadership and to ask the embarrassing question: "What were the present leaders doing when all these atrocities of Stalin were perpetrated?" Khrushchev has asserted that no one could protest, for fear of his life. Nothing can change the impact of this confession. The Communists themselves admit that the Marxist dream of world-wide brotherhood had turned into a nightmare of tyranny. That confession was bound to shake the whole tyrannical structure. The question is whether it will

shatter the empire and, if so, how long the process of disintegration will require.

Let us recall how this tyranny developed. The Marxist dogma provided for a "dictatorship of the proletariat." According to the dogma, this dictatorship was necessary because the messianic class, the workers, was bound to be insecure until its class enemies were "liquidated." The Marxist dogma deals only in blacks and whites, whether it is analyzing national or international facts. The fact that there are grays and browns in both realms, which do not correspond to these simple categories, may be a powerful force for the disintegration of the dogma.

The theory was that the workers would exercise a dictatorship to eliminate their class enemies, but they would enjoy a perfect brotherhood among themselves. They would not need courts and policemen because they would put down any anti-social behavior by spontaneous action.

It is well to note the utopian touch in the vision of a democracy within a dictatorship, because it is the first clue to the question why the Marxist utopia turned into a hell. The visionaries did not consider the ordinary problems of a community, the competition of interests, the arbitration of rights, the adjudication of conflict. The only cause for conflict, namely property, was abolished. But meanwhile, the community on the other side of the revolution needed to be organized. It could not rely on spontaneous action. The embryo of the organization lay in the party. The dogma had assumed that, while the workers were the messianic class, they needed the party to inform them of the logic of history and what good things it intended for them. The workers had an existential righteousness, but evidently no wisdom. Lenin declared that they, left to themselves, could not rise above a "trade union psychology". How right he was. The Marxist dogma would always outrage the common sense of common men. It could be believed only by the ideologues. These were the secular prophets who became the priest-kings of the utopian state.

So we proceed from the dictatorship of the workers to the dictatorship of the party. But the party must also be organized. Everywhere the need for government, which the dogma had defined as merely an instrument of oppression, makes itself felt. Without integration, the masses are merely a mob. The party must have a "central committee." That committee is even now the governing group of the party in theory. But the committee was, and is, too large for executive action. The ruling group within the committee was first a mere class war improvisation. But naturally, its powers grew rather than diminished. The real oligarchs emerged. They had the power. It is this "democratic centralism" of Lenin to which the present oligarchs would fain return, after experiencing the baneful effects of absolute tyranny. It must be observed, however, that Lenin, while more subtle than Stalin, was potentially a dictator. He did not allow real discussion even within the ruling group. Above all, he did not allow "factions." He was the charismatic leader who knew the logic of history better than his colleagues. Had he not prophesied correctly?

But without real freedom, either within the party or in the community, there was nothing to prevent a shrewd manipulator, Stalin, from bringing all the organs of power into his single hands, from liquidating even the oldest prophets who did not agree with him, and from terrorizing a whole generation of newer oligarchs—many of whom owed their positions to his favor and had helped him to eliminate his foes. It is this absolute monopoly of power which proved to be so vicious and which is now defined by the euphemism, "the cult of personality." The present oligarchs would like to eliminate the possibility of a return to such a tyranny, yet meanwhile, they try to maintain their own power and preserve the dogma which sanctifies it. That is what all the commotion is about.

It is easy to see that it is not possible to guarantee freedom from arbitrary rule without guaranteeing freedom for everyone in the community to challenge power.

Therefore, many people will see in the present circumstances the promise of a rapid development of democracy. But they will be disappointed if they expect a rapid disclosure of the logic of democracy within this empire of utopianism and tyranny. Let them remember that it required four centuries for Western Christian civilization to develop the logic of a free society. The pretensions of the papacy and the pessimism of the Reformation had to be vanquished before Western communities could find the way to order compatible with freedom and freedom compatible with justice. The tempo of history has changed, and, therefore, it will probably not require four centuries in Russia. But it will be a tortuous process with many false starts. We can be content with the fact that the process has begun and that the dogma which supported this tyranny and threatened the whole world with disaster seems to be in the process of disintegration.

That is what makes all the current events behind the Iron Curtain so interesting. We are living in grand and awful times. They are awful because there is always a chance that, before the disintegration has gone far enough, we will stumble into a nuclear war with this empire which reared a hell of cruelty upon utopian illusions.

R. N.

The Continuation of Our Unfinished Task

With this issue, *Christianity and Society* ceases publication just shy of its twenty-first birthday. There is perhaps something ironic in the consideration that a journal which has always been so largely concerned with political matters should go out of existence just before it would have become old enough to vote. And yet, there may be something symbolic here as well, if it is true, as Reinhold Niebuhr's lead editorial suggests, that these two decades have seen our nation and American Protestantism approach political maturity and if our journal has made some small positive contribution to that development.

Without being sufficiently presumptuous to claim that *Christianity and Society* quite constitutes the *Heilsgeschichte* within the periodical literature of the past two decades of American Protestant social thought, it can with modesty be stated that during this period—and in spite of its always rather minor circulation—it has been an audible organ of social, economic, political, and cultural analysis and criticism from the perspective of prophetic Christian theology.

We do not terminate our life in the illusion that this analytical, critical, and theological task has been completed. But neither do we do so with the sense that our cessation leaves a serious vacuum. One reason for our serenity is the continued vitality of *Christianity and Crisis*, a bi-weekly journal of Christian opinion, with Reinhold Niebuhr and John C. Bennett as co-chairmen of its editorial board. Unexpired subscriptions to *Christianity and Society* will be completed by *Christianity and Crisis*, and it is hoped that those whose subscriptions expire with this issue will become subscribers to *Christianity and Crisis* if they are not already. (For details concerning these arrangements, see pages 22 and 23.)

Christianity and Crisis is an independent publication. It has no official connection with Christian Action or with any other organization. However, many of the persons who have had a hand in *Christianity and Society* have also been involved in the life of *Christianity and Crisis*. It is anticipated that our readers will find in *Christianity and Crisis* the same quality of stimulating commentary which it has been our aim to provide in *Christianity and Society*.

A. W. H.

By Way of Introduction

For the benefit of readers who may not be familiar with Christianity and Crisis — and for those who have not seen this bi-weekly recently — we wish to indicate something of its history and of its present somewhat broadened concern. To this end we reprint here, with minor adaptations, an editorial by Robert McAfee Brown, which appeared in the April 16, 1956, issue of Christianity

and Crisis. The editorial appeared originally under the title "The Extension of the 'Crisis'."

Christianity and Crisis first came into existence as an attempt on the part of a small group of people to relate the Christian faith to the days of crisis prior to the United States' entry into World War II. Its sponsors felt that the U.S. had an obligation to be involved in the struggle already taking place on the Continent. Since that time, the journal has remained alive because it is clear that there has been and will be no let-up in the "crisis situation" in which we live, and that the Christian faith must always be related to the perennial crisis of our existence before God.

Throughout the fifteen year life-span of the journal, the crisis has been interpreted chiefly in political and economic terms. There has been a consistent attempt to spell-out some of the implications for faith and from faith of America's national and international life. But save for exceptional articles or editorials which broke the pattern, most of the attention has been directed to the political and economic arena.

It is well known that the word "crisis" means not only a critical time, a time of testing, but that it also, and even more fundamentally, means "judgment." A crisis is a time of judgment, and the judgments of God are not limited simply to the political and economic scene, though they may be most readily discernible there. The judgments of God extend throughout the whole length and breadth of our culture, so that it can be said that there is no aspect of life which is immune from His searing and healing concern. And it is now the intention of the editorial board of *Christianity and*

Crisis to give increasing attention to these other areas of life in which the "crisis" is manifest. Since the judgment of God is always "judgment to save," we must be prepared to find him speaking in and through voices or groups which do not consciously represent him, and we must be prepared to find his word being distorted in and through voices or groups which do consciously represent him.

In the light of these facts, the collective editorial eye of *Christianity and Crisis* plans to scan a wider horizon than has been done in the past. We shall try to see what is being said to us not only in politics and economics, but in the modern novel, the contemporary theatre, the world of art, and the very important mass-media of television, radio and motion picture. Our initial forays in these directions will of necessity be modest, but they will be directed by the conviction that God has a concern for all of life and that we must be prepared to discern His hand at work in the most unlikely places. We are sure that there are times when His hand is more creatively present in the so-called "secular" realm than it is in the more conventional channel of revelation, and that a Christian journal must be alive to this likelihood.

The new format which the journal has recently assumed stands as a kind of symbol for this extension of concern. New typography and design, a different spacing of articles, occasional art work — these things have been introduced not only to increase "readability," but in an attempt to relate form and content with greater integrity. We will need the help and advice of our readers as we seek to make the changes in content commensurate with the changes in form.

R. M. B.

Drive-In Churches: The So-Called Return to Values*

PETER VIERECK

The displacement of the relativist materialism of the 1930's by the household pieties of the 1950's is not really a gain, from any earnestly conservative viewpoint, if these household pieties are not the marble but the plaster ones. Writers hitherto known less for the hair-shirt than the main-chance are falling all over themselves to generalize vapidly about conserving America's Christian value-heritage. Those of us who cherish this heritage, not vapidly but with commitment, should not be deceived by our surface agreement with these new lip-service saints. The internal threat to America's value-heritage no longer comes merely from the discredited old materialism of the Marxists, "hard-boiled" semanticists, and relativistic anthropologists-of-religion, but from the new, mealy-mouthed lip-service to religion, tradition, the Constitution, and kindness to dumb animals. (Not to mention opportunistic kindness to a safely bowdlerized and Republicanized "conservatism," a kindness particularly amusing when coming from liberal magazines that imagine themselves "fearless" detectors of sham.)

The Subversion of Values

Then what of the much-heralded "return to values" on the campuses? "Youth," we are told with stage trumpets, "again believes." The churches and the middlebrow magazines preen themselves on the increased figures for college chapel attendance and campus religious discussion. Statistically, the increased figures are valid enough. But they raise a different question: do people believe more than before, or do they only believe they believe? Or believe they ought to believe? Or finally: how many of the new unctuous-voiced ones mean that life would

be convenient for their ambitions—less world crises, less pushing around—if everybody *else* believed in God and practised Sunday School manners?

Recently a movie actress chose to inform her fans of her "acceptance of God." She did so with all the self-conscious mandarin solemnity of a T. S. Eliot informing a hushed world that he had become "Anglo-Catholic in religion, royalist in politics, and classicist in literature." Confidentially under kleig lights, she explained that, when you really get to know Him, God is "a living doll." Not an inner change of heart but an outer Act of Congress, namely the new public law 140 of 1955, requires on all American coins: "In God we trust." It provides a reassuring glow to find *Him* also added to the pledge of allegiance and the latest postage stamps. In fact, Congress has now officially dedicated to God a "meditation room" in the Capitol, furnished as plushly as the rooms allotted to all the other lobbyists; long a shady internationalist of no fixed abode, God has now been made a 100 percent American by majority vote. Besides being approved by movie actresses and Acts of Congress, the sanctimonious stampede to the womb has received that ultimate imprimatur, a commercial "market-research analysis" by "promotion executives":

GREENWICH, CONN., April 27—The National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church learned here today about a new counter-attack on the menace of paganism in American cities. . . . The question is one of salesmanship. . . . "Plans are under way," said the Bishop, "for a market-research analysis, religion-potential surveys and similar emphasis, led by competent sales and promotion executives." (*New York Times*, April 28, 1955.)

Churches are hawking more of their

* This article will appear in Mr. Viereck's book *The Unadjusted Man*, to be published in autumn 1956, by Beacon Press, Boston.

wares than before by installing more neon lights and loudspeakers than before. Religion is made more "convenient" for the car-owner-in-a-hurry by a new institution proudly advertised as "drive-in churches." That phrase seems the ultimate comment on the entire "great revival of religion." What is still lacking is any money-back guarantee to car-owners-in-a-hurry that their new sanctity has brought them any closer to a drive-in heaven.

Something or other is certainly being revived in America today, judging by all these countless examples, but is it religion or religiosity? Religion is demanding, unglib; it combines the hardest spiritual discipline with the most shattering emotional experience. Therefore, the Overadjusted Man prefers religiosity; it is easy, painless, provides a warm, comfortable feeling. Such is ever the fate of values when made bourgeois. Here "bourgeois" is being used not in the economic sense employed by Marx (nor in the political sense in which practically everybody in America, ours being a non-feudal, non-proletarian country, starts off as a mild Lockean-liberal bourgeois) but in the spiritual and also aesthetic sense employed by Baudelaire. In that sense, the bourgeois subverts traditional spiritual values—and also subverts serious aesthetic commitments—not by rebelling against them but by giving them the two wrong kinds of support: hypocrisy, dowdiness.

Hypocrisy—"he talks God and means cotton"—is the less important of the two subversions; few bourgeois are deliberate knaves. Dowdiness, in contrast, is not hypocritical but all too sincere: "At our bridge table we think religion and culture are just too grand for words." How many rebels have been goaded into radicalism by hearing traditional values praised too stuffily, too meanly?

Conservatism (in the sense of Coleridge, John Adams, Burke, Adlai Stevenson) is no such painless bourgeois complacency but a painful soul-searching critique of our capitalist-materialist progress. Therefore, the present Eisenhower-era complacency, currently denounced as "America's creeping

conservatism," is not conservative at all. It is a liberalism, a nineteenth-century, laissez-faire liberalism, grown too successful, too stodgy, too fat. The best Biblical comment on this overadjusted conformity of the Eisenhower-era prosperity is, to quote the Proverbs of Solomon, "The liberal soul shall be made fat" (Proverbs 11:25). What passes for left and right in America is usually merely a family quarrel between lean and fat versions of the same liberalism, the same (in Baudelaire's sense) bourgeoisie, the same optimistic, top-of-the-brain faith in the blessings of industrialism and the inevitability of progress. Hence, the philosophical conservative in America (in the Melville-Hawthorne tradition) has nothing in common with so-called "right-wing politics" (nationalist isolationism), which is really not so much right of center as mid-west of center.

The Utility of Being Anti-Social

How, then, are traditional cultural and religious values conserved if the hypocrisy and dowdiness of their present would-be conservers are really subverting them? Universal values are conserved by inner personal experience—thereby the universal and the particular meet—and not by wholesome social adjustedness. Even the most social and shared of values will not remain alive unless first conserved anti-socially: namely in that "morbid" lonely isolation where all impersonal truths and social blessings have their intimate personal roots. Thus, in terms of conserving cultural and religious values, even a utilitarian cannot deny the social utility of being anti-social, the collective healthfulness of lonely "morbidness."

The spirit of an age is sometimes better captured impressionistically than statistically. Note the clue that Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking* was America's most popular nonfiction best-seller during the same years that Eisenhower was America's most popular personality. Highminded evasion of problems, affable relaxation of critical alertness, comfortable religiosity and harmless platitudes, a genu-

(continued on page 21)

"Christian Action" in Perspective

ROBERT T. HANDY

"Christian Action," an unofficial, inter-denominational fellowship concerned with the relationship of Christian faith to social, economic, and political problems in the United States, was founded in September, 1951, at a conference at Howard University in Washington, D. C. The organizing meeting had been planned following conversations between members of the Frontier Fellowship and some others, especially a group from the Yale Divinity School. The Rev. Charles S. McCoy set up this first national Christian Action conference, to which two hundred Protestant leaders came. The main outlines of the new organization were shaped through discussion and planning sessions. A widely-representative Executive Council was elected. Soon a headquarters office was opened, and a full-time executive secretary set to work.

Then, nearly half a decade later, it was decided to close the national office as of February 1, 1956. While Christian Action was not formally disbanded but continues as an informal and unstaffed fellowship, it is clear that it has become something different from what was envisioned and maintained for four and a half years. What is the meaning of this change, this failure to remain active as a national organization? What, viewed in perspective, is significant about Christian Action and its vicissitudes?

Growth in Size and Visibility

Those that came to the founding meeting of Christian Action came in response to "A Call to Christian Action" which closed with these words:

It is time for those of us who believe that Christian faith must be expressed in the current struggle for justice in politics, economics, community life, and international relations to unite with one another. In a common organization founded on definite principles of faith and action we can strengthen one

another, learn from one another, and break through the frustrating inaction which is sapping the life out of our faith. With God's help we can meet the reaction, the disillusionment, the fanaticism of our time. We are called to join together in a fellowship of prayer, study, and work, seeking to be God's instruments in the task of furnishing men with the full Christian Gospel, and with its social fruits of justice, bread, liberty, and community.

Accompanying this "Call" was "A Prospectus on Christian Action," which stated that Christian Action was to hold the general position of the Frontier Fellowship, but on a broader base in terms of theological and social analysis. On social issues, it was declared that

the new fellowship will be committed to the basic principle that Christian social action is secular, that it is to relate itself to problems of justice at every level of community and that it is to be entered into in cooperation with any persons or groups whose program bids fair to achieve justice in the given situation. The fellowship will not deal in social action directly; rather it will seek to train its members to act in their own concrete situations, and it will support them morally and spiritually in their action as well as in their faith.

A "Statement of Purpose" was hastily framed at the initial gathering at Howard. It expressed the ethos of the new movement in the words: "We are a group of Christians . . . seeking to discern the judgment of God upon ourselves and . . . to fulfill our common responsibilities under God. . . . We believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ summons us to face fearlessly the political, economic, and social realities of our time, and to act responsibly for the healing of the whole man and society." More specifically, the

statement affirmed that "the Gospel impels us to work together for a responsible society . . . which will give each person or group a fair and equal opportunity to develop his potentialities." The group declared its intention of working through the churches and ecumenical agencies, for "the true Church is God's instrument properly transcending class, racial, and national loyalties."¹

The newly-formed fellowship took over the management of the quarterly, *Christianity and Society*, from the Frontier Fellowship. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr remained the editor; he and Dean Liston Pope became co-chairmen of the Executive Council. The Rev. John W. Turnbull became the first Executive Secretary.

The new organization rather quickly found a cordial if modest reception. There seemed to be a real need for such a fellowship. A significant number of Protestant leaders were sufficiently in accord with its general position as to lend encouragement and support. A vacuum in the American Protestant scene was filled, at least partially, by the new movement. Christian Action soon reached a useful level of maturity and service. Professor John C. Bennett became chairman of the Executive Council in 1952 (Niebuhr and Pope then became honorary chairmen). Turnbull served as executive for about a year and a half; he was followed by the Rev. Robert A. Gessert, and he in turn by the Rev. Douglas Sturm. Under this leadership, the organization grew in size and visibility. By the spring of 1954, Niebuhr could write an article on "The Significance of the Growth of 'Christian Action'" in which he could point to its "remarkable success."²

A number of evidences of this "success" can be indicated.³ Membership increased to over 1200. Over a dozen local chapters were organized at widely scattered points across the country. Five national annual conferences were held (Howard, Alexandria, Downingtown, Howard, Morgan State). A number of local and regional gatherings and retreats were sponsored. The quarterly journal and a monthly newsletter were maintained. A series of useful Foreign Policy Action sheets were distributed; a number of reprints and brochures were made available. Various controversial issues were dealt with; for example, actions against the Bricker amendment, for public low-cost housing, and against McCarthyism were taken in 1954. The executive secretaries did a great deal of work on behalf of Christian social action "in addition to their regular duties"—they served on many strategic committees, wrote hundreds of letters, and made thousands of phone calls on behalf of more effective Protestant social awareness. To be sure, there were problems, of which the financial was the most insistent. Yet, thanks to sacrificial giving on the part of members and assistance from a few foundations and generous donors, the annual budgets continued to grow as Christian Action sought to fulfill its objectives.

Curtailment of Activity:

External Factors

Then—suddenly for those who were not close to the center of the organization—came the decision to close the national office and allow the organization to become an informal fellowship, with initiative left to the local chapters. But those who made the decision believed that the combined effect of certain external and internal factors was such as to make the organization somewhat irrelevant and to suggest a different approach.

As to the external factors, there was a considerable change in atmosphere from 1951 to 1956. In 1951, McCarthyism was a rising threat, and church voices to sound warning were much needed. A great deal

1. A report of the first conference, including the full text of the Statement of Purpose, can be found in *Christianity and Society*, XVI (Autumn, 1951), 15-19.

2. *Christianity and Crisis*, XIV (1954), 30-32.

3. This paragraph is summarized from an article, "The Visibility of Christian Action," *Monthly Newsletter of Christian Action* (December, 1954), 1f. For more details on the program, see "Practical Guides for 'Christian Action,'" *Christianity and Society*, XIX (Special Issue, 1954), 11-22.

of Christian Action attention was, by 1953, focused on this matter. John Bennett stressed this in his keynote address at the national conference that year, saying:

It is possible that in 1953 the sphere of civil liberties is the one where we can accomplish most. Here we are all opposed to the current reckless type of anti-communism, to the tendency to make charges against individuals without emphasizing the date of the connections which are regarded as damaging, to the intimidators of schools and colleges, to the wild generalizations about communism among the clergy, to the pressure to conform to which people in countless communities are subjected. There are some by-products of this present wave of investigations and charges which need to be emphasized. There is the use of the anti-communist smearing to discourage all social reform.⁴

And probably the most widely-quoted statement issued by Christian Action was on McCarthyism—and that long before the turn of the tide. By 1956, however, the overt threat had passed; happily, the atmosphere had become much more normal.

In 1951, there were those who felt that all social action was tainted with fellow-traveling. So Christian Action had to insist that Christian social action could and should be predicated on Christian premises and motivations, and that cooperation with those whose premises and motivations are directly contradictory should be rejected. Actually, of course, there had been very little penetration of the Christian social movement by Communists and their sympathizers. As Niebuhr put it,

The explicit communist sympathy on the left wing [of the social gospel] was very minimal, but unfortunately the few genuine Stalinists controlled two unofficial denominational groups. The tolerance toward this kind of politics in the church by Christians who did

not agree with it but thought no church group could be "prophetic" without tolerating "radicalism" (even if that radicalism offered an alternative to the injustices of the present order which was definitely worse) is one of the perplexing phenomena of the religious life which "Christian Action" must face.⁵

So Christian Action had to spend considerable effort in making clear the nature of true Christian social action and resisting efforts to let it be exploited by alien interests. Today, the validity of Christian social action is pretty widely accepted, in theory if not in practice; one who is an exponent of social concern in the churches no longer has to defend himself as to the source and imperative for his concern so vigorously, though he may have a difficult enough time winning support and acceptance.

Another aspect of the climate of 1951 was the vigor of a number of unofficial groups urging a particular and often reactionary social and economic program as *the* Christian way for America. "Of such aberrations," wrote Niebuhr, "the chief errors [include] an extravagant individualism which tries to gain religious sanction for a very heretical (from a Christian standpoint) *laissez faire* economic theory."⁶ By 1956 most of these groups are still active, but no longer loom so large on the horizon as they then did. At one time it seemed as though the National Council of Churches might not fulfill some of the prophetic functions it inherited from the Federal Council, but after a half-decade of life it is clear that the National Council is very much concerned with the social implications of Christian faith. Though Christian Action members may find themselves in sharp disagreement with this action or that statement, yet they recognize that the National Council is deeply and responsibly concerned with social issues. As the letter to Christian Action members announcing

4. "Focus for Christian Action," *Christianity and Society*, XVIII (Autumn, 1953), 20.

5. "The Significance of the Growth of 'Christian Action,'" *Christianity and Crisis*, XIV (1954), 31.

6. *Ibid.*, 30.

the closing of the national office put it, "when we began there was some uncertainty as to how the newly-formed National Council of Churches would move, but today, on most social issues, the National Council is providing much better leadership than seemed likely in 1951."⁷

At the outset, Christian Action was deeply troubled by the Protestant aversion to politics. As "A Call to Christian Action" expressed it,

Protestant church members often feel that politics is a dirty business. They remove themselves from the political arena, leaving the daily decisions about bread, about freedom, and about the faith that should motivate the rulers and the ruled in this world to "worldly" men who do not mind "soiling" their hands with compromises and "unsavory" power struggles.

This, of course, is a stubborn problem, and no one could claim that there has been much improvement. Yet, the thesis that Christians should be responsibly related to political realities as citizens is one that is echoed with greater frequency in Protestant circles, as a spate of recent books makes clear.⁸ Various ecumenical pronouncements further emphasize the point.

Curtailment of Activity: Internal Factors

Externally, then, the considerable shift in atmosphere made what seemed necessary in 1951 somewhat problematical by 1956. But internally, too, the organization had shown certain limitations, so that it lacked the resiliency to adjust easily to the new situation. First, there was from the begin-

ning a certain lack of clarity as to the chief focus of the fellowship. "A Call to Christian Action" spoke of "definite principles of faith and action"; "A Prospectus on Christian Action" declared that "the fellowship will not engage in social action directly." Many then asked, what really is the meaning of "Action" in the title? Is Christian Action a group for analysis and study only, or does it try to bridge the gap between those who probe and those who act? If so, how? The "Prospectus" noted that Christian social action is secular—but then what does the "Christian" in the title mean? Can there be *unambiguous* Christian witness in fields that are secular? Answers to these questions were often attempted, but never to the satisfaction of many of the members, some of whom wondered if the work Christian Action was engaged in might not better be done through local social action committees, denominational agencies, and interdenominational instrumentalities.

Second, like many a small organization, Christian Action was troubled by a shortage of leaders. Those who did carry the load of Christian Action, most of them, were already busy in dozens of organizations. Often those who were sincerely interested in Christian Action had to refuse to accept a leadership task because of the press of duties elsewhere. Then, it was found difficult to decentralize leadership, hard to secure individuals and groups very far from the support of the office to take on definite assignments and responsibilities. And the "enforced leisure" of Reinhold Niebuhr, coming so soon after the founding, was a handicap.

Third, a certain organizational logic seemed to operate in its own stubborn way, forcing the agency down a road it was not sure it wanted to take. At the outset, effort was made to keep the organization informal and simple. But the necessities of maintaining accurate membership and subscription lists, of sending out timely renewal notices, of supporting local chapter organizations with lists of prospects, printed matter, etc., meant that our national office had steadily

7. *Monthly Newsletter of Christian Action*, V (January, 1956), 2.

8. E.g., cf. John C. Bennett, *The Christian as Citizen* (New York: Association Press, 1955); Edgar M. Carlson, *The Church and the Public Conscience* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956); William Muehl, *Politics for Christians* (New York: Association Press, 1956); James A. Pike and John W. Pyle, *The Church, Politics and Society: Dialogues on Current Problems* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1955).

to expand in size, personnel, and equipment. This demanded a rising budget, which in turn meant that an increasing load of staff effort was spent in raising money. An ever-larger annual sum seemed needed just to remain in operation.

Finally, the financial problem, as a consequence of the combined effect of the external and internal factors, became more and more difficult.

Fresh Approaches Needed

All these considerations played a part in the decision to close the national office. As the letter to the members and friends of Christian Action which announced the move summed it up:

Underlying the decision to close the national office has been the realization that fresh approaches to the analysis of social, economic, and political problems from the vantage-point of Christian faith are now needed. The social problems of our time are as deep and fateful as such problems ever have been, but the next steps to be taken or the approaches toward solutions of these problems are not such as to give a very clear character to an organization that is concerned about them. On issues concerning which convictions have become clear, as in matters of racial segregation, the need is for concrete steps in local situations, which can be done through existing agencies. On the other hand, the cultural problems which are created by such things as economic abundance or mass communications call for tentative exploration rather than for pressure in behalf of a position.

Correspondence from members, following the announcement, often indicated regret that the step seemed necessary, but in general approved it. One letter, for example, declared that

movements such as Christian Action are, it seems to me, vital so long as they maintain a Christian orientation to problems while recognizing that organization is not an end in itself. The decision to close the National Headquarters is to my own way of thinking a step in the direction of asserting that we are concerned about vital matters and will let the form of our organization be determined by the problems to be met and the orientation from which we operate.

Christian Action continues through its local chapters. The New York Chapter has planned a number of features for its next year's program; the Chicago group has re-organized as the "Christian Frontier Fellowship." Also, the publication resources of Christian Action are being brought to the support of the bi-weekly, *Christianity and Crisis*, for *Christianity and Society* is being discontinued. Many of the same writers have contributed to both journals—Niebuhr and Bennett have been the mainsprings of both ventures—though the two periodicals have been officially unrelated. *Christianity and Crisis*, which has a circulation three to four times larger than this quarterly, is currently extending its horizon beyond the political and economic into the wider areas of culture, an interest which has been growing within Christian Action. *Christianity and Crisis* can be used by Christian Action chapters to serve many of the purposes which have been fulfilled by *Christianity and Society*.

In closing, we repeat the hope of John Bennett, that "some of the results of this experience will be preserved and we shall be able to help others to act more effectively when new issues arise or when old issues take new forms that call for the kind of Christian witness which will obviously require embodiment in a voluntary movement."

REVIEWS

The Perils of Radical Dissent

The Power Elite, by C. Wright Mills; Oxford Press, New York; 1956; 423 pp.; \$6.00.

It is ironic that a review of C. Wright Mills' latest book should appear in the last edition of *Christianity and Society*. For Mills is one of a diminishing band of radical dissenters in American society. *The Power Elite* illustrates the perils of radical dissent.

Mills, a sociologist at Columbia University, describes our society as under the domination of "the Big Three"—the corporation, the state, and the military establishment. "Religious, educational and family institutions are not autonomous centers of national power; on the contrary, these decentralized areas are increasingly shaped by the big three, in which developments of decisive and immediate consequences now occur. Families and churches adapt to modern life; governments and armies and corporations shape it; and, as they do so, they turn these lesser institutions into means for their ends. . . . And the symbols of these lesser institutions are used to legitimate the power and decisions of the big three. . . . The leading men in each of these domains of power—the warlords, the corporation chieftains, the political directorate—tend to come together to form the power elite of America" (p. 6, p. 9).

The massive strength of the "power elite" depends upon several institutional trends: (1) The growing convergence of self-interest among military, economic, and political institutions; (2) "The social similarities and psychological affinities of the men who occupy the command posts of these structures . . . [and] the increased interchangeability of the top positions in each of them" (p. 296); (3) The lack of any effective check upon the actions of the power elite. Mills flatly rejects J. K. Galbraith's theory of counter-vailing power, and assumes that the power elite at the top is "increasingly unified" and "willfully coordinated" while "the bottom of this

[American] society is politically fragmented, and . . . increasingly powerless" (p. 324).

Thus, Mills concludes, "We can readily understand why the power elite of America has no ideology, and feels the need of none, why its rule is naked of ideas, its manipulation without attempted justification. It is this mindlessness of the powerful that is the true higher immorality of our times; for with it, there is associated the organized irresponsibility that is today the most important characteristic of the American system of corporate power" (p. 342).

This book represents a curious sort of radical dissent. Mills intends to explore the crucial problem of how institutional context influences personality patterns. But unfortunately, he fluctuates between giving us the cynical lowdown on higher-ups, and shrill denunciations of nearly every group in American society: "local society," "the metropolitan 400," "the corporate rich," "the warlords," the new conservatives, the "timid" intellectual community, the post-war liberal, etc. Mills scorns "the power elite" for being "mindless" and "irresponsible" without once making explicit his own criteria for "rational" policy planning or moral responsibility.

The Power Elite is a disappointing book. It is more a Marxian lament over a prosperous mixed economy than it is an accurate and penetrating criticism of the present power arrangements in American life.

ROBERT W. LYNN

Anxiety Calmly Considered

Anxiety and Faith, by Charles R. Stinnette; The Seabury Press, Greenwich, Connecticut; 1955; 209 pp.; \$3.50.

All too many current books on anxiety are by anxious people for anxious people—rich with panaceas of power, peace, and pep! Occasionally, a really mature book comes along addressed to mature readers, offering more understanding than self-help. *Anxiety and Faith* need not be snapped up by the anxiety-neurotics as "something that might help me!" But it should be read by

a whole host of thoughtful Christian ministers and laymen. It explores the complex problem of anxiety from an avowed, knowledgeable Christian viewpoint. Stinnette has soaked up a great deal of psychological wisdom, and he has chosen his mentors (H. S. Sullivan, Fromm, Horney, *et al.*) well. But he writes as a Christian theologian—and primarily to Christian readers—about the significance of Christianity for understanding and dealing with the tensions and disabilities of anxious living. This is doubtless just as well, for experience has shown that the psychotherapists, by and large, make inattentive listeners when Christian theologians try to talk to *them*.

Stinnette's chief theological guide is his former teacher, Reinhold Niebuhr, whose re-interpretation of Kierkegaard's *Concept of Dread* (in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I) is by now the great modern classic in this whole area. One sees Niebuhr's influence most plainly in Stinnette's emphasis upon the *irreducibility* of anxiety in human experience. It is "unavoidable in life—even necessary" (p. 27). "Anxiety is at the *base* of man's life" (p. 73). Christianity's answer to anxiety begins by accepting it as *irreducible*. "Christianity is a way of *through* anxiety by faith" (p. 170). There is a subtle equivocation here. Anxiety, according to Stinnette, has at least three rather different meanings (p. 29) and is rooted in our freedom and our freedom to abuse our freedom. But are creative and discreative anxieties both—and *equally*—"at the *base* of man's life"? Stinnette seems to think so (p. 194). But then he goes on to balance this with a doctrine of original righteousness (p. 102), which is *not* Niebuhrian, and which suggests a very real difference between "primary anxiety" (awareness of freedom) and "sinful anxiety" (awareness of estrangement).

Part I is a phenomenology of anxiety, an analysis of its roots and fruits. Part II is an essay on human nature—and how it is misshapen by anxiety and guilt. Part III (the most original section of the book) applies the Christian message to the anxious self and shows how this message is received and

shared by the community of grace which is the Church. The Church is the matrix of "the holy fellowship" which men may have with God and with other men. It is life in *this* fellowship which sustains us in suffering and death. In it we come to know ourselves and our dread fears "embraced in the imperishable love and mercy of God" (p. 202).

This book will prove a treasure to thoughtful men who need a calm, clear, Christian word about anxiety, men who can profit from an impressive range of sifted learning (psychology, sociology, literature—even Pogo!). Here they will find a Christian thinker who has succeeded remarkably well in the difficult business of assimilating the world's wisdom into a vital and stable interpretation of God's good news to alienated and fearful men.

Reading books about anxiety is not a very effective *therapy* for anxiety-neurotics. But a book like *Anxiety and Faith* will lead almost anyone into a deeper *understanding* of the problem of anxiety and its best solution.

ALBERT C. OUTLER

Theology for Laymen— A Layman's View

Modern Rivals to Christian Faith, by Cornelius Loew; Layman's Theological Library Series, Westminster, Philadelphia; 1956; 96 pp.; \$1.00.

The Significance of the Church, by Robert McAfee Brown; Layman's Theological Library Series; Westminster, Philadelphia; 1956; 96 pp.; \$1.00.

Numerous books have been written for the Christian layman. Few books have spoken to him, and still fewer laymen have spoken for the books. Because the "Layman's Theological Library," under the general editorship of Robert McAfee Brown, is specifically addressed to the "common" layman, who generally lacks a working knowledge of Christ and the Church, I have been asked to review the first two volumes in this new series. My theological background is weak, but my interest in the Church and

my desire to be a part of it have always been strong. This review could very well be yours, if you are an average Christian layman.

Modern Rivals to Christian Faith deals with present-day idolatries. Idolatry is indeed tempting. Its success and popularity, the magnetic bandwagon effect produced by man-made rivals to Christian faith, provide a stern test of our true allegiance. The positive search for false idols and the uprooting of secret gods are the fundamental issues in this fine book by Cornelius Loew.

It is a pointed book, and it strikes remarkably close to home, calling for a reappraisal of idols such as science, democracy, patriotism, the Bible, and the church. Although these have unquestionable appeal, they are definitely secondary to the faith and worship that all Christians must exhibit toward God. Our loyalty rests with Him, and only that devotion is responsible.

This is a one subject book. It has the single purpose of exposing idolatries, and that it does well. Whether so many words are necessary for this exposition is debatable. Loew speaks of the misinterpretation of Christianity, and his discussion of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale's method of positive thinking, as well as of Billy Graham's theme of repentance, appears harsh and slanted. While the author's attitude may be justified, a more tempered point of view might be more helpful.

This book is not as meaty as the second in the series. Dr. Loew, however, speaks with clarity, and his understanding and portrayal of the problems confronting the layman are genuine. If perhaps too much was made of one subject, it may be excused, for surely fake idolatries have become a much too integral part of our lives.

The Significance of the Church is a frank, honest, and very wholesome discussion of the more necessary facts that any layman might want to know about his church. Dr. Brown succeeds in putting down the "meat" of the complex theological structure. He presents only the really pertinent points, without the usual long and involved historical paragraphs. The entire book is much

like a child's prayer in mature words. It speaks plainly, always understandably, saying enough and leaving out the irrelevant. More important, the book involves the reader.

Perhaps the opening chapter on "A Long Hard Look at the Church" is not as strong as it might be. It is here that he details the criticism and popular misconceptions generally leveled at the Church. It serves much as a fruit cup appetizer, filled with great assortment, but with no distinctive flavor. He quickly, though, goes on to other courses, all very nourishing to the mind and completely digestible.

Dr. Brown's analysis of the Christian vocabulary is very worthwhile. He offers a precise explanation of words like "Protestant," "faith," "works," "priesthood," and many others vital to the layman's fund. These are not definitions in the dictionary sense, but prose pictures, entirely clear and memorable. They add a new significance to words quite familiar to all of us.

The author suggests that the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was really the most decisive event in the life of the Church. The cause and effect of this Reformation are well told. He traces the history of the Church and the early Christian community in a brief manner. It is apparent that the word "community" is all-important to Dr. Brown as well it should be to all laymen. Community embodies all the satisfactions of fellowship, offers a sense of belonging, and (as the author points out) only as members of the Christian community can we take a responsible part in the fulfillment of His work.

The true meaning of the Church is well related, and the segmented presentation is helpful, although I should have liked a more unified treatment. A complete chapter deals with that subject often discussed by Protestant laymen, the Roman Catholic. The author's attitude is both reasonable and tolerant, and he suggests a course that is logical and acceptable. His sane approach toward our Roman Catholic friends is encouraging.

Nowhere is the author more convincing

than when he speaks of man's relationship to God. He never lets us forget that the proper center of the community of fellowship and of worship must be God. It is his feeling that the sacraments of communion and baptism establish that close identity with God so necessary in Christian life.

I felt an urgency on the author's part—a very live but not coercive appeal—to support only that which is the true gospel, and to show that laymen must involve themselves in all of life. The real work, the true affirmation, needs to be practiced daily, even hourly, on the part of the layman. Accept your church and its minister, but not blindly, the author urges. Dr. Brown advises us to question and draw forth explanations and always to ask ourselves, is it really God's will that is being done? He pleads for a continuation of the Reformation, and strongly reassures the reader that the Protestant movement today is very much alive, imbued with great vitality and urgency. This, though, needs the physical and spiritual cooperation of all Christian laymen.

The Significance of the Church is a helpful book, realistic in its approach to the layman. It is a practical guide, for most that it offers can be applied immediately. It deals in fundamentals and expresses them in a straightforward style. I felt very much affected and I am sure you will.

ROBERT C. MARVILLE

Reverent Agnosticism and the Church

The Strangeness of the Church, by Daniel Jenkins; Doubleday and Company, New York; 1955; 188 pp.; \$2.95.

Daniel Jenkins is a living and lively embodiment of the spirit of ecumenicity. He is pastor of a Congregational church near London part of the year and theological professor at the University of Chicago during the remainder of the year. He is scholar and preacher in the best Calvinist-Biblical tradition, profoundly informed by and sensitive to the main currents of contemporary thought—secular as well as religious, Cath-

olic as well as radically Protestant—but above all, he is firmly rooted in what he has sometimes called the “reverent agnosticism” which is the Biblical apprehension of the Word of God, “God’s speech to man” in Christ.

The Church is obviously a superficially familiar institution in Western society. This familiarity is perhaps the greatest barrier to understanding the true nature and function of the Church—these can best be seen only in the light of the perennial strangeness of the Church. This essential strangeness is not the quaintness of the Church, neither is it the apparent hypocrisy of church people. The strangeness consists not in the fact that it grows old, but rather in that it is continually reborn of a power not its own; not in the fact that it brings forth often disillusioning and even pretentious fruits consistent with its humanity; but in that it brings forth many spiritual and even humanitarian fruits in spite of its humanity; not in the fact that it is in this world, but in that it is not of this world. Here in the eyes of the world there re-enters an element of apparent pretension—for the Church in its visibility is human, yet it claims divine foundations and a divine destiny. For the Church itself in its self-understanding this claim is the very opposite of pretension; it is the profound assertion that her foundation and destiny, her nature and function, are not her own, but rather her Lord's. Its time is “between the times” of His sacrifice and promise and of His ultimate fulfilment.

It is from such a point of view about the Church, which is convincingly Biblically based, that Mr. Jenkins penetratingly re-examines and re-presents the major motifs which have informed the best Protestant conceptions of the Church. He is controlled not by what he would like to think, certainly not by what he thinks his readers would like to read, not even by loyalty to a provincial tradition—rather he is controlled by his own reverent agnosticism. His own apprehension and presentation of the Message is challenged, though not overcome, more by his own questioning than

by less thoughtful "cultured despisers of religion." His own faith is more certain and more reverent than that of more eager "defenders" of religion. Under his criticism, partisans of a radically "voluntary-association" conception of the Church are hardly left more comfortable than partisans of a strictly organic conception (often more vegetable-like than animal-like). Under his sensitivity, genuine fruits of the Spirit are discerned in widely divergent places.

Of especial interest to the readers of this journal are Mr. Jenkins' chapters on "The Church in Society" and "Church and State."

With specific regard to the Church's relation to the State, this, of course, is various, depending much on the State with which the Church has to deal in any particular time and place. Two considerations about the State in the Western democracies ought to be kept in mind: First, there are many Christian men who serve the State who have a right to the Church's guidance. Secondly, "there is no reason to suppose that the State cannot be made to serve the glory of God and the true welfare of mankind like any other human institution." Clearly this is not an argument for theocracy; a pluralistic society can serve God's purposes and can enlist the efforts of Christian men. Perhaps Mr. Jenkins' most prophetic word to those of us who would be prophetic with respect to society is that the "pastoral function of the ministry in relation to politicians has been much neglected, yet it is a far more constructive contribution to Christian influence than any number of resolutions or pronouncements of church assemblies."

This book is written primarily for laymen. As such it is about the best this reviewer has seen on any subject. It is written lucidly and directly, without condescension and without distortion. Because it is intended primarily for laymen, it is not to be by-passed by clergymen except at their own deprivation. This reviewer happily acknowledges a debt of gratitude to Mr. Jenkins for this fine volume.

ROBERT A. GESSERT

The American Way and the Inner World

The Dignity of Man, by Russell W. Davenport; Harper & Brothers, New York; 1955; 338 pp.; \$4.00.

"Davenport was haunted by the conviction that he had a special mission on this earth. This mission was to precipitate in words, from the limitless flux of American life, the special meaning and mission of his country. . . . He thought of his task as answering Karl Marx at all levels—economic, political, and spiritual: and the spiritual level came first because, he said, 'Only if we can give the word *spiritual* a real and self-evident content can we hope, in turn, to give meaning to the political principles on which our system is based.'" (From the preface, by John Knox Jessup.)

The project was cut short by Davenport's early death in 1954. *The Dignity of Man*, as it stands, is therefore not the full-fledged vindication of the "American way of life" which had been envisioned, but only a preparation.

In analyzing the contemporary crisis, Davenport makes a special point of addressing the "ordinary mortal" or "intelligent layman." The book reads, in fact, somewhat as a string of *Life* editorials. With firm, well-paced style, it should communicate effectively—if the intended laymen read it. This holds especially for the more preliminary phases of the analysis: showing that the communist challenge reaches deeper than H-weapons, espionage, or living standards. Evidently there are plenty of intelligent laymen to whom this case still has to be made; maybe they will listen to a former editor of *Fortune* where they might not listen to others. In some respects the exposure of the ideological dimension of the challenge is the clearest I have seen. However, where the more complex matters are involved, the effort to continue in a popular vein leads toward obscurity. Discriminations precious to the "expert"—but also integral to the subject—are dissolved in such fearsome generalities as "philosophical optimism" and "pessimism," and "outer" and

"inner worlds." Yet, considering how he wants to beam the message, Davenport does trace his way remarkably well between unnecessary technicality and inadequate simplicity. The precise balance seems to be getting harder and harder for anyone to find.

The argument itself moves across a stage supplied by the moral certitudes that communism is abhorrent and that America is essentially right. The complication consists in the fact that, despite its obvious evil, communism is so successful, and has even seized the ideological initiative. The American predicament is that we do not know how to make the real truth plain to the world at large. Our irony, if you will, is not that we have pretended to be more virtuous than we are, but that we are more virtuous than we have known how to pretend to be. America is not iniquitous, as its enemies charge; its tragic flaw is inarticulateness.

Not that we are merely taciturn. "The tragedy-in-the-making that America represents is the tragedy of a man of good will, who is unable to carry out his good intentions because he is *philosophically immature*" (p. 126, italics added). For although our traditions presuppose a "spiritual" view of man—in which freedom is metaphysically real and the individual possesses inviolable dignity—we have not learned to give this view basic intellectual corroboration. Among the factors impeding maturation, the most disastrous has been permeation of our own modes of thinking (with a few notable exceptions such as Reinhold Niebuhr) by the same materialism which supports Marxism. In cultural attitude this is expressed by our unilateral "optimism" (i.e., optimistic secularism). But the real villain has been "metascience"—philosophy built on science alone. If the thesis of this philosophy, which in the West prefers to call itself "naturalism" (p. 151), is correct, "*then the case for communism is stronger than the case for the free way of life*" (p. 151). Actually science and hence metascience can construe only the "external" world; whereas human dignity, freedom and brotherhood are "inner" realities. The task is to discover a method of thought which

can confirm and proclaim this inner world.

It is here, in the "foothills," that the book begins to break off, pointing onward to the high "Himalayas." Clearly inadequate to Davenport is the proposal, held by many to be the only one plausible, to articulate the "democratic way of life" in a consensus of "middle axioms." The decisive question concerns the fundamentals, the ultimate principles. But equally inadequate to answer the question, so far as the West as a whole is concerned, are our religious traditions. Some encouragement is drawn from the fact that science is not as materialistic as it once was. But the direction in which a positive answer seemed to lie was the "living approach to reality" of Goethe (p. 334)—Goethe as interpreted and extended by Rudolf Steiner (the founder of Anthroposophy). "On this path, Davenport believed, the individual could develop his resources in a strictly rational way, and he himself could describe the path without moralizing or sounding a retreat to inherited religious orthodoxy" (Jessup, in the preface). Yet Davenport admits that "every human undertaking is at some point an act of faith. In this book our faith is placed in the ability . . . of free individuals to face any question, and master any problem, that challenges their freedom" (p. 28).

In the review I have taken description as the germane interest. For readers of this journal the critical points are too obvious to dwell upon: the too simple trust in "free individuals," the intellectualistic or gnostic bias, the lack in crucial respects of fundamental socio-political realism. There is much in the book that can be appreciated; and one would not omit saluting an unmistakable nobility in the man. But if Davenport is at all symptomatic, he shows those who would relate Christianity to American thinking about society how far they still have to go. His call for constructive philosophical work is salutary—and perhaps judges the presumptuous obscurantism which cannot disguise itself behind some current re-emphasizing of Christian categories. One can only hope that in exposing the shallowness of much popular under-

standing of the communist problem, he has not encouraged deeper American tendencies toward uncritical self-righteousness; and that in rightly pointing beyond scientific externality, he has not strengthened the trend toward sanctifying the existing "outer" through appeal to a spiritual "inner." Communism is not only a "metascience," but in the eyes of "millions" a promise (however false) to take their *historical*

insecurities seriously, and to rectify *concrete injustices*. Davenport knew, in view of this, that it never would be enough for the "American way" to establish dignity, freedom and brotherhood as *merely* inward realities. But the philosophy, or the faith, of Rudolf Steiner hardly offers the most relevant path from this point forth.

A. DURWOOD FOSTER

Drive-In Churches (continued from page 9)

ine kindliness blended with pap—there you have the *impression* the decade makes, whatever its statistics say about a "return to serious spiritual values."

Normally one would expect the universities to be a gadfly-corrective against this folksy-wholesome spirit. Why, instead, are professors and students more averse to serious personal commitments than ever before? Because the thought-controlling demagogues invade the campus, say many liberals. But the campus of the 1920's and 1930's, facing even worse thought-controllers, responded by commitment, not apathy. Therefore, the explanation for campus apathy lies not merely in an external threat but in an inner mood independent of that threat. The external threat to academic freedom has by now been successfully repelled in the better universities; not so that inner mood. What that mood fears is not merely the anti-intellectual demagogues but the ridicule of fellow pro-intellectuals. You suffer ridicule if you commit your personality passionately, generously; if you create novels, poems, paintings of vitality and moral challenge; if you respond with spontaneous excitement to ideas, whether dangerous or safe ones, political or nonpolitical.

The preference is for ideas, poems, creeds

made impregnable against ridicule by an elegant knowingness. Why not debate ideas and write literary criticism with gusto, instead of with a bland savoring of technique? Think ye because ye are virtuosos there shall be no more cakes and ale?

The campus politics of the 1930's, with its radical illusions, was wrong-headed, the art crude. Were these important disadvantages outweighed by the important advantages of a more exciting, creative atmosphere than today's? Each alternative has its costs, its compensations. In one sense, the radical, materialistic commitments of the 1930's sometimes contained a more religious spirit than the elegant savorings of religion—even the many sincere ones—in the academic drawing-rooms today. For religion requires the willingness to be embarrassing, inelegant. Because it is an act of love, every true religious commitment is and ought to be a *gaffe*.

And yet, at the risk of seeming endlessly to multiply distinctions, let us add: an act of love, while enthusiastic, must not consist of enthusiasm alone. Enthusiasm alone is a mere romanticism of undisciplined instinct, running amok into pantheism, sentimental nature worship. Absence of enthusiasm is a merely partial, merely cerebral, merely syllogistic commitment to God. Christian love is simultaneously enthusiastic and disciplined.

NEWS OF CHRISTIAN ACTION

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY has, since the closing of the national office, been supervised by the New York Chapter. On the recommendation of the membership of the New York Chapter, and with the approval of the Executive Council, the Board of Directors of Christian Action has decided to end the publication of the quarterly, making arrangements with the bi-weekly *Christianity and Crisis* to complete unexpired subscriptions.

This action had been under consideration even prior to the decision to close the national office and represents the culmination of numerous previous discussions. The major determinative factors in this decision were the following:

(1) The closing of the national office and the cessation of the collection of annual dues from our national membership mean that the financing, editing, circulation, promotion, administration, etc., of *Christianity and Society* would soon have become highly problematic.

(2) There is already a considerable overlapping of leadership, readership, and content between C&S and *Christianity and Crisis*, which has between three and four times the circulation of this journal.

(3) *Christianity and Crisis* is currently expanding its interests beyond the political and economic realm into the broader areas of culture, a concern which has been shared by Christian Action.

(4) Effectiveness might be increased and a duplication of effort (often on the part of the same people) might be avoided if Christian Action lent its support to *Christianity and Crisis* and ceased maintaining its own separate journal.

(5) *Christianity and Crisis* can be utilized by Christian Action members and local chapters to serve many of the purposes which have been fulfilled by C&S. *Christian-*

ity and Crisis would be able to publish many of the articles which may grow out of life of Christian Action.

* * *

THE THROBBINGS OF VITALITY are heard from various local chapters as Christian Action continues its new mode of existence as an informal fellowship. In Alhambra, Fred Coots is serving as convener of the Christian Action chapter of Southern California (or at least portions thereof). He reports fruitful discussion meetings involving the leaders of denominational and other social action groups.

Also in California, a very vigorous group is meeting monthly at the home of Lex Miller in Palo Alto. The group is made up largely of persons who hold positions of responsible leadership and concentrates on the discussion of local community problems which immediately confront members of the chapter. They do not conceive their function as that of an "action" group. In fact, there is a standing rule that no motions will be passed. Rather, the members seek to help one another in understanding the tasks they confront in their several callings. We are told that the group has a very informal structure, so it may be assumed that the leadership is charismatic.

The New York Chapter has recently elected Maxine Thornton as chairman; Bernard Loomer is chairman of the group in Chicago which has been organized under the name "Christian Frontier Fellowship."

* * *

REPORTS AND SUGGESTIONS from individuals and chapters concerning activities and means whereby our fellowship may be maintained are welcomed by the Board of Directors. Communications should be addressed to Dr. Robert T. Handy, Union Theological Seminary, 3041 Broadway, New York 27, N.Y.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL SUBSCRIBERS: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY!

With this issue *Christianity and Society* ceases publication. The considerations which have led to this decision are briefly indicated in the "News of Christian Action" on the opposite page. Unexpired subscriptions will be completed by the bi-weekly journal of Christian opinion, *Christianity and Crisis*. For an account of that journal, see the editorials "The Continuation of Our Unfinished Task" and "By Way of Introduction" in this issue.

The subscribers to *Christianity and Society* fall into two categories: those who are members of Christian Action and, therefore, receive C&S on the basis of having paid their membership dues for the current year, and those who are non-member subscribers and receive this journal simply by having paid for a subscription. The following announcements are addressed to each of these groups in turn.

MEMBERS OF CHRISTIAN ACTION: The membership year of Christian Action ends August 31st. Since no dues are being collected, now that the national office has been closed, *your subscription automatically expires with this issue!* It is hoped that members and local chapters will now turn to *Christianity and Crisis* to fulfill the function which has belonged to C&S. If you are already a subscriber to *Christianity and Crisis*, well and good! If not, then you are

strongly urged to take advantage of the generous introductory offer which *Christianity and Crisis* is making, as indicated on the order blank which is provided below for your use. (A few Christian Action members have sent in money for subscriptions to C&S since the closing of the national office. These will, of course, be treated in the same way as the subscriptions of non-member subscribers.)

NON-MEMBER SUBSCRIBERS: Unexpired subscriptions will be completed automatically by *Christianity and Crisis*. The subscription rate for C&S has been \$1.50 per year (4 issues). The regular subscription rate for *Christianity and Crisis* is \$3.00 per year (24 issues). A bit of arithmetic will thus show that one year of C&S is the financial equivalent of six months of *Christianity and Crisis* and that one issue of C&S corresponds to three issues of *Christianity and Crisis*. The completion of subscriptions will be on this basis. Those who are already subscribers to *Christianity and Crisis* will, of course, have their subscriptions to that journal extended for the appropriate length of time without any additional charge. (If your subscription to C&S *expires* with this issue, and you are not already a subscriber to *Christianity and Crisis*, then you—like the member subscribers—are urged to make use of the order blank below.)

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At the Hour of Our Birth

... However badly organized religion has become enmeshed in the immediate interests of class and nation, it has also always generated out of itself a minority of prophetic spirits who placed the pretensions of their culture and civilization under a divine judgment. In that capacity for judging all relative and partial values and in the humility which does not claim to reach an absolutely pure judgment itself, even while it sees what is partial and incomplete in every culture, in these lie . . . the guarantee of perpetual revolution, protest, rebellion and criticism in human affairs.

It cannot be denied that this prophetic and revolutionary spirit in religion is frequently corrupted and destroyed. But it must also be recognized that the too simple Marxian might regard it as counter-revolutionary at the precise moment when it is functioning most perfectly. For that might be a moment when it calls attention to the fact that proletarian culture can be no more absolute and final than bourgeois culture was and that therefore the working class ought to be content to fulfill a great and fateful task in history without claiming to be a messianic class which will usher in the kingdom of God. A truly prophetic religion ought to turn against the spiritual pretensions of a proletarian culture as well as against preceding cultures. It is one of the tragedies of modern culture that the radical rebel against religious complacency and dishonesty falsifies the real facts and the total situation by condemning religion for its virtues as well as for its vices. Its virtues are of course bound to appear like vices from the perspective of a purely political religion. For those virtues are the ability to see and the courage to say that history relativises all ideals and that human passions and interests condition all ideologies, including those of the leaders of proletarian rebellion.

It is consequently the business of radical religion to contend equally against the reactionary tendencies of organized religion and against the misunderstandings of the total human situation in the philosophy, and therefore in the strategy of radicalism.

—Reinhold Niebuhr, *"Is Religion Counter Revolutionary?"* in the first issue (Autumn 1935) of *Radical Religion*, which later became *Christianity and Society*.